

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6517

As of January 29, 2010

Title: An act relating to early learning.

Brief Description: Promoting early learning.

Sponsors: Senators McAuliffe, King and Kline; by request of Governor Gregoire.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/27/10.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Kimberly Cushing (786-7421)

Background: The Department of Early Learning (DEL) was established in 2006 as an executive branch agency. The primary duties of DEL are to implement early learning policy, and to coordinate, consolidate, and integrate child care and early learning programs in order to administer programs and funds efficiently.

Under current Washington law, "nursery school or kindergartens that are engaged primarily in educational work with preschool children and in which no child is enrolled on a regular basis for more than four hours a day" are exempt from licensing requirements. Preschool is not defined in statute.

In 1985 Washington created the state-funded Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), a comprehensive whole child, family-focused, preschool program designed to help low-income and at-risk children and their families succeed in school and life. The program was modeled after Head Start. In Fiscal Year 2010 there are 8,053 ECEAP slots funded at \$6,662 per slot. The Department of Early Learning (DEL) administers the ECEAP, and directly contracts with service providers.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature intends to make early learning preschool opportunities available to every three- and four-year-old child in Washington. Opportunities can be expanded by combining state support with private payments.

DEL Duties, Including Certification. DEL must establish a certification process and a timeline for certifying all preschool programs serving three- and four-year-olds. DEL must

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charge fees for the initial certification and renewal. The fees must be set to defray the costs of certification. The fees must be fixed, and adopted in rule. DEL must review ECEAP and Head Start standards, recommend improvements for program quality, and work with the federal Head Start representatives to integrate state and federal programs to better serve children and families. DEL must develop, coordinate, and implement services and programs for children from birth to three.

The Early Learning Advisory Council must update the 2010 statewide plan every five years.

All Start. The All Start voluntary preschool program for three- and four-year-olds is created. DEL must develop programs for All Start and phase it in as funds are available, beginning in September 2013, and making it available to all three- and four-year olds by September 2020. Implementation must begin in areas that have state-funded all-day kindergarten.

DEL must establish a schedule of state support and copayments based on ability to pay for families at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). DEL must establish the following: criteria for eligible providers, public and private; program criteria, including obtaining preschool certification; criteria for early childhood educators; performance measures; curricula options; programs for family participation; and requirements for plans to help children and families transition to kindergarten. DEL may adopt rules to implement All Start.

ECEAP. Without reducing services to children, ECEAP providers may admit additional children with incomes above 110 percent of the FPL and may charge a fee. If state funds are available, DEL may establish a schedule of state support and copayments for families with incomes between 110 and 200 percent of the FPL.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 15, 2010.
[OFM requested ten-year cost projection pursuant to I-960.]

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: All children should be served. Children should not be labeled at risk at ages three and four. Labels stay with children for life. There is great value in putting children together and not just serving those at risk. The Governor wants kids in programs that are mixed and wants to provide support to parents who cannot afford to pay. The Governor reached her decision based on the decision of the Attorney General. Certifying preschools is a loop we need to close. We certify many professionals and we need to certify the preschools where our children are.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator McAuliffe, prime sponsor; Jada Rupley, Educational Service District 112; Leslie Goldstein, Governor's Executive Policy Office.